

Read the Bible in a Year

Week 34 – January 23-29

Read on Your Own this Week:

Psalms 100-102

Matthew 13-16

Readings in Class:

Job 19-42

Introduction to 1 & 2 Thessalonians

The books of 1st and 2nd Thessalonians are most likely the first books of the New Testament that are written. From what we know in the Book of Acts, chapter 17, the timeframe of Paul's ministry in Thessalonica and resulting letter put the time and letter to 51 AD.

Paul's time in Thessalonica was short. He spent only 3 weeks there. The Christians that were made there quickly became close with Paul. But tension and dissention were stirred up by those in the area who did not like Paul or the Christian message and the riot got started against Paul and many were seeking to kill him. Christians smuggled Paul out, a little against his will, and he was left without contact with the Christians there.

1 Thessalonians was written in response when Paul discovered that the Christians there had not only survived but were thriving. This first letter is a thanksgiving letter for the faith that the Thessalonians were built in and for the Word of God that had done it, even though they had only been Christians for 3 weeks. In his first letter, Paul takes the time to expand upon a few of the teachings that he had delivered as a means to remind them of the faith that they received in hopes to strengthen them with more when he is able to return to them.

2 Thessalonians was written in response to 1 Thessalonians. One of the teachings that Paul mentions in his first letter, stirred up more thoughts and questions that were pressing to the church. Paul writes this second letter to expound upon the thoughts of the return of Jesus. This letter forms the backbone of Christian teachings concerning the return of Jesus Christ and the judgement that is coming, the salvation that will be given the events that will take place prior to his return. Paul uses this teaching to encourage and comfort the Church to look forward and toward the return of Jesus and to act accordingly.

A Brief Summary of 1 & 2 Thessalonians

1. 1 Thessalonians
 - a. Greeting 1:1
 - b. Thanksgiving and Concern for the Church at Thessalonica 1:2-3:13
 - i. Conversion of Thessalonica 1:2-10
 - ii. Paul's brief Ministry in Thessalonica 2:1-12
 - iii. Paul Persecuted and Driven Away 2:13-16
 - iv. Reestablishing Contact with the New Church 2:17-3:10

- c. Encouragement/Teaching
 - i. Introduction 4:1-2
 - ii. Marriage 4:3-8
 - iii. Brotherly Love 4:9-12
 - iv. End Times 4:13-5:11
 - v. Life in the Church 5:12-22
- d. Conclusion 5:23-28
- 2. 2 Thessalonians
 - a. Greeting 1:1-2
 - b. Thanksgiving 1:3-12
 - c. End Times Fleshed Out 2:1-17
 - d. Apostolic Instructions 3:1-15
 - i. Request for Prayers 3:1-5
 - ii. Discipline in the Church 3:6-12
 - iii. Keeping Each other Accountable 3:13-15
 - e. Conclusion 3:16-18

The Power of God's Word

Paul's chief worry that prompted his letter to the Church is whether these Christians who have only been Christians for 3 weeks were able to survive the persecution and the trials that swept through just as they came to faith or if they fell away. Paul sent Timothy back to town to check on them and learns through Timothy that the congregation didn't just survive the persecution but that they are an example of the faith to all in the surrounding land.

Paul's answer for why the Church survived persecution despite being what many would call inadequately trained and prepared is the power of God's Word. Their faith is genuine because it is founded upon God's Word. This is a testament for us to remember that the strength of the church does not lie with the right technique but trust in the Word of God to do what the Word promises to do.

End Times

The key in both books of Thessalonians is the teaching on the return of Jesus. What Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11 about Christ gathering his church together in the air, raising the dead, and the timing of Jesus' return caused the Thessalonians to ask further questions that Paul extrapolates in 2 Thessalonians concerning not to be alarmed and to also be aware of the man of lawlessness that precedes Jesus.

A lot of confusion surrounds this man of lawlessness, mostly because Paul assumes what his audience knows about it already without filling in us as the readers. But the main point that we should derive from this teaching is the confidence that we have in Jesus Christ and that all who oppose Jesus and hurt his body the church will be dealt with and we will be given peace.